

***Do You Trust Me?***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR499)**

**by**

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## Abstract

*Do You Trust Me?* explores definitions and understandings of safety and belonging across identities and experiences, with regards to race, ethnicity, color, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and body size. This project is rooted in the realities of safety throughout different public and private spaces, especially on a college campus, with application to Ball State University. These concepts are expressed through storytelling, dance, body movement, poetry, and collage. In viewing *Do You Trust Me?*, audiences will consider their own perspectives and what is truly important in conversations about identity, safety, and belonging on campus and in the community.

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Process Analysis .....	1
Literature Review .....	11
Film .....	26
Press Kit .....	27
Artist Statement .....	28
Poems/Graphics .....	29
References .....	30



## Process Analysis

### Do You Trust Me?

#### *The Framework*

I thought I had a title for my thesis my first year at Ball State University: "*Can You Hear My Bra Strap?*" I was interested in what clothing says about a person before they can open their mouth to speak, and how that impacts others' perceptions of them. I chose "bra strap" because of the implicit provocativeness and association with sex, and therefore of perceived sexual availability. I thought more about how much appearance powers interactions between people: Can You Hear My Race? Ethnicity? Queerness? Religion? What do you think about me? What assumptions are you making? Do I care?

When I applied to college, I wanted to study Biomedical and Industrial Engineering, and Fashion Forecasting. I have always excelled in and enjoyed math; I saw myself pursuing it as a career until I was reminded of my feminine inferiority one too many times. The most blatant was at a summer engineering camp – where I was one of only three girls – I was sidelined to create the PowerPoint while my younger male teammates took credit for my idea and built the robot. In my pursuit of fashion, I found myself using my mathematical aptitude as a justification or bolster for my interest in a "futile" and "intellectually dissatisfying" field of study. I was again isolated, though this time in a female-dominated field. I began to understand how much an environment impacts how one feels about themselves: how they express and carry themselves, as well as how they view their capabilities.

Occurrences in different public spaces are what drove my thesis: how can someone learn in class when they are overtly or covertly being told they are not

supposed to be there? How can someone exist in public when they have been taught that they are not safe enough to transport themselves? One of the most important things about public spaces is that we encounter difference. We interact with people who do not have the same experiences as we do, though are just as deserving of respect and tolerance as we are. Public space confronts people to be tolerant. Public space challenges people to be accepting.

Upon my arrival at Ball State University, I declared a major in Magazine Journalism with minors in Fashion and Women's and Gender Studies. I soon realized that this was not exactly the fit for me. My Honor's advisor, Amanda Ballenger, notified me of the opportunity to create my own major. The second semester of my first year, thanks to Dr. Jim Ruebel and Dr. Melinda Messineo, I created "Appearance, Stereotypes, and Social Change," to study prejudice and discrimination based on appearance through sociological, psychological, feminist, and fashion perspectives. I can't help but smile whenever I think about how lucky and driven I was to craft an educational experience that was entirely my own. It allowed me to participate in a Virginia Ball Center Immersive Learning Project, arts program in New York City, and exchange program in London, England.

Throughout these experiences, I grew to believe that people make a place. I believe we have more to learn from each other than any other source. I believe listening is one of the most valuable skills one can have. I believe listening is the most valuable skill I have. I believe listening to understand rather than listening to respond is essential. I believe the act of listening can change the world. I would not be who I am without the people I have met these past four years. I would not be who I am without the



opportunities I have created and received these past four years. I wanted my thesis to be a platform to share my own experiences, my friends', and those who shaped my growth throughout college. I wanted my thesis to encompass even just a snippet of the environments in which I was immersed.

*Storytelling and "Hey, Sorry I Know You Have Homework But Can We Film Today?"*

I chose to create a narrative film as the bulk of my thesis because I believe that people connect more passionately with stories and experiences than they do with research and statistics. In creating my film, I wanted the subjects to be as candid as possible. I did not want to filter their thoughts, emotions, ideas, and expression. I had an idea of what I thought the film would be, but I could not fully understand it until I conducted the interviews. Through my VBC Immersive Learning Project, "*Beauty, Objectification, Violence: Dancing Toward Change*," I gained a greater appreciation for dance and body movement as a form of expression and storytelling. I also learned how to converse with people of different art mediums by having to translate my ideas into directions and descriptions in their languages. I knew I wanted to incorporate body movement and shapes into my film, which influenced the people I chose to include: they must be interested in the project as well as be comfortable dancing in front of a camera. I am lucky to have exceptionally talented, bright, genuine, and generous people in my life that three of my friends agreed to let me pick their brains and witness the beauty of their movement. I also had a friend offer to create music for the film.

Taking on the task of creating a film for my thesis felt simultaneously daunting and nonchalant. I had only helped create one, three-minute-long, short film before and I

did not have a grasp at the entirety of the process of creating a 35-minute-long film, nor did I know where to begin. I had loose ideas of what I wanted the film to be about and what I wanted it to look like, but needed to convey those ideas in a way that would make sense to people I would ask to be a part of it. Additionally, I had to navigate my relationships with the participants as friends and people I was directing: I learned to occupy space as the sociable coworker and assertive leader simultaneously.

### *Academic Requirements and Whitesplaining*

In creating my film and writing a literature review, I struggled with being able to sense what is common knowledge and what I need to further explain. I have surrounded myself with many similar-minded, socially-engaged, passionate, intelligent, creative people with whom I share common interests, experiences, and knowledge with; I am incredibly happy and proud to be around them and also have found it to be difficult to imagine what people outside of my network spend their free time questioning, discoursing, and doing. Are they also calling their representatives? Learning how to ollie? Attending conferences? What are they talking about? The lack of representation in government and everywhere? Where they hope to travel? How they will make the Frida Kahlo shrines for their home? If they aren't talking about what my friends and I are talking about or haven't lived it, how much of the information in my thesis is familiar to a wider audience? Do they care? How do I get them to care? Is that what I'm trying to do?

I did not want to have to explain the overarching topics behind my thesis. I did not want to write a literature review informed by research and scholarly articles. Writing a literature review felt like I was contradicting and opposing my film and catering to



White audiences, cisgender audiences, male audiences, and heterosexual audiences to make this information digestible for them. I wanted my film and thesis to speak for themselves and be received as they are. Synonymous with the title of my thesis, I wanted audiences to trust Alyssa, Anthony, Justin, and me. As the poet J. Jennifer Espinoza said, “reminder that you don’t need to be well-versed in a bunch of academic jargon for your gender to be valid, it’s a gender not a fucking thesis,” (Espinoza, 2017). I wanted people to take my thesis for what it is and not question its validity simply because it is by and about non-heterosexual, non-White, non-male, non-cisgender individuals’ experiences and not a 40-page research paper.

It is truly a privilege to have been able to attend college at all, and even more so to have received the phenomenal education that I did. I have academic jargon to deploy any time I open my mouth and I also know that is not always the most effective way to communicate my message. Some people communicate and understand best through processing statistics and research, some people connect more with an individual’s interpretation of information or an individual’s experience. I want to converse with anyone who is open to conversing with me – except for the people who attempt to disguise or believe their bigotry as a political viewpoint rather than their driving principle – which means I want my language to be accessible and comprehensible for people of all learning styles. I want my thesis to be accessible. I will deploy academic jargon in my literature review for those craving research and I also do not believe that people should have to explain their experiences in the format of a five-paragraph essay or a 40-page thesis.



### *Habitual Sexual Violence as Standard*

Another part of my thesis centers on gendered violence, sexual violence because that is another environment I was [am] immersed in. It is another environment my friends are immersed in. It is another environment in which I found community as a way to survive. I created the poems and artwork because as much as experiences are individual and personal, they are also often communal, universal. When the #MeToo movement took off and the news about Aziz Ansari broke, there were many messages and viewpoints being thrown around. There were ideas about “bad dates” versus trauma, harm, and assault. I remember one man saying something along the lines of, “Well, if the Aziz Ansari thing is sexual assault, then all women have experienced sexual assault,” and I wanted to grab his shoulders and shake him because yes, it is most likely that all womxn have experienced a form of sexual violence – why don’t you get it?! I believe that all womxn have experienced a form of sexual violence; including rape, sexual assault, harassment, stalking, and exploitation, though they may not have acknowledged that themselves or defined their experience as such. The pervasiveness of sexual violence is something that many men do not understand. Just as White people do not see themselves contributing to the perpetuation of racism, discrimination, and prejudice because they themselves have not explicitly worn a Confederate flag, I believe that most men do not see themselves contributing to the perpetuation of sexual violence because they themselves have not directly assaulted someone.

*Physical Safety and Trying to Convince Men That I'm Not Scared of Being Mugged*

In May through August of 2015, I worked at the Dane County Rape Crisis Center in Madison, Wisconsin and with faculty and staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I learned about UW's Safe Walk program and was beyond eager to bring it to Ball State. Safe Walk is a peer/buddy walking system to escort people to locations on and around campus such as a library or dormitory. It is a service that operates at night, typically between the hours of 8:00pm-2:00am. The staff of Safe Walk is trained by local police and operates in pairs, typically one male and one female student. Students, faculty, and staff can request a walk and a pair of Safe Walk students will show up and walk them to their destination.

In my efforts to bring Safe Walk to Ball State, I thought about the countless times I have called a friend or family member to stay on the phone with me as I walk home at night nervous, on edge, anxious, or scared. Or when my friend wouldn't leave the library until I did because she was too afraid to walk home alone even though she had been yawning for the past 25 minutes and finished her schoolwork long before that. It is infuriating to think about how debilitating it is to not be able to transport myself somewhere without fear of violence.

I approached members of Student Government Association, Transportation Services, and the university and local police officers from August 2015 through December 2017. I had meetings with numerous people and provided them with research on the Safe Walk programs at universities and colleges in the Midwest and throughout the United States. I was led to believe that they were pursuing different ways to implement a Safe Walk program at Ball State yet in the end, nothing happened. I only



met with male identifying individuals and I believe that is part of the problem. Campus safety must be considered through numerous lenses and it is crucial that one of those is gender.

I cannot count the number of times I was scoffed at for suggesting a Safe Walk program at Ball State. The men I met with promptly advocated for the use of a phone application to notify contacts of your whereabouts, as well as calling police officers or the Charlie's Charter van for a ride, or asking a friend to help. There are a few problems with these options. A phone application cannot replace a human being. A phone application cannot do anything to combat a perceived or real threat immediately and directly, like a human being may be able. Another problem is that many spots on campus are not easily accessible by vehicle or do not require a vehicle to transport between, such as Bracken Library and DeHority Complex. This is a very short walk, though potentially intimidating nonetheless. To call a police officer could be making this a bigger deal than it may be. Also, police can be intimidating, untrustworthy, and unfamiliar to some people. Furthermore, friends are not always available. Even if a friend is available, after walking one's friend to their destination, the other person may have to walk by themselves.

As my thesis progressed, especially in light of current events on campus regarding the number of sexual assaults in dormitories and fraternity houses, I began to worry if this Safe Walk program was the right answer. Though I believe this program would be beneficial, I do not want this program to be seen as the solution to sexual assault. It is not. I do not want this program to reinforce the myth of stranger assault as the most common form of sexual violence. It is not. I do not want this program to let the

administration, fraternities, and men in general off the hook. And though I believe this program would be a helpful addition to Ball State regarding feelings of safety on campus, especially to female students, freshmen students, and foreign exchange students, I do not want to explain and advocate for this program any more.

### *To Be Continued*

I recently attended a talk by the authors of *The Arsenal of Exclusion and Inclusion*, where they stressed the importance of starting their project as practitioners rather than scholars. They emphasized the power in reaching out to experts instead of claiming to know everything themselves. One of the strengths of my project was that I saw myself and carried myself as a practitioner, not a scholar. I did not claim to be an expert of film, sociology, or anything beyond myself and what I hoped to create. I was not afraid to ask for help or say, "I don't know," and that is one of the best practices I could have engaged in.

Throughout the process of creating my thesis, I asked a lot of questions of myself and others. Questioning is one of the driving forces that keeps humans going. If we did not have questions, we would not evolve and progress. I remember in class with Dr. Timothy Berg, he said that his new conversation starter was, "What are you questioning right now?" The questions we have say a lot about us, I think. What are you curious about? What do you spend your time pondering? My thesis stemmed from my questioning the lack of understanding and empathy in people, especially in the United States. I am questioning the lack of trust people seem to have in people of marginalized identities. I am questioning the discounting of peoples' lived experiences and feelings,



as this often translates to the gaps in knowledge and viewpoints between different groups of people.

Working through my thesis, it was difficult to figure out what was enough and when it was “done.” Many of the topics in this project are complex and intersect with other ideas, which made it challenging to find a stopping point. Additionally, I did not feel I could do my knowledge or interests justice in just one project. Both the intellectual and emotional parts of me wanted to create more, and throughout this experience I was relieved to realize I do not have to – that is not being asked of me and even if it was, I cannot fulfill that task. I am proud of that realization. I am proud of this project.

I hope that this project feels incomplete. This is only a glimpse of the experiences and perspectives of my friends and myself; there are more stories to be heard and seen and I can’t wait for them to be shared.



## Literature Review

### Do You Trust Me?

Issues of diversity and social identities such as race, gender, religion, and nationality are at the forefront of social, political, and economic conversations. The existence of certain individuals is being debated: whether immigrants, people of color, womxn, trans\* folks, queer folks, and people of other marginalized identities have the right to occupy space, live in safety, and receive the same liberties and freedoms that others have been afforded based on their privileged identities. The term “identity politics” has been used as a way to politicize individuals’ experiences and detract from the core issues: people being treated as second-class persons and less deserving of basic human rights; people being told they are asking for special favors; people losing their lives because of their identities.

As the country—and specifically college campuses—become more diverse in race, ethnicity, gender identity and expressions, and sexual orientation, the institutions and spaces people are occupying must come into question: Who were these made for? Do they support us? In regards to the experience of students of color on a college campus, the institutional environment is influenced by government policies, the campus’s historical legacy of racial exclusion, numerical representation of students and faculty of color, and racial behaviors inside and outside the classroom (Hurtado, 2002). Ball State’s diversity statement includes, “At Ball State, diversity is an integral part of our identity. Our success depends on our efforts to cultivate inclusivity within our pedagogical, scholarly, and creative pursuits...Ball State is committed to ensuring that all members of the campus community are welcome through our practice of valuing the

varied experiences and worldviews of those we serve,” (Ball State University, 2017). Of Ball State’s enrollment of approximately 22,000 students, “ethnic minorities” make up about 12 percent. The integration of and support for students of color on campus must be considered in order to understand if Ball State is living up to its mission. With regard to the current social and political climate, how are students’ feelings of belonging on campus and trust in Ball State impacted by personal experiences of bias, aggression, and silence?

### *Diversity Discourse*

While people are likely to explicitly endorse values of egalitarianism and equality, they may implicitly act in ways that express prejudice. Bell (2007) describes the discourse about race in the United States as “diversity without oppression.” Most people would agree with diversity as a value, but may simultaneously fail to acknowledge or engage in discussion about the role of systemic inequality in diversity. Systemic oppression can be difficult to discuss because it means one must also discuss privilege and therefore acknowledge one’s own power and position in society. Thus, conversations about diversity often acknowledge culture and identity, and might even celebrate them, but lack the topics of [in]equity, the role of power, and access (Bell, 2007).

The way diversity is discussed and conceptualized also sees distinctions between people of color and White people. People of color more often conceptualized diversity as a “moral or civic responsibility” rather than a “demographic fact” in comparison to White people (Bell, 2007). White people do not see diversity as



something that requires action or effort, but rather something that simply is. People in majority groups are inclined to define diversity in ways that allow them to view themselves favorably: i.e. defining diversity in a way that is consistent with how the group is already heterogenous. This lets White people off the hook and allows them to dismiss accountability for their lack of action.

In Sue et al.'s 2011 study, they stated, "The more White the classroom is, the more likely it is [the students] to be silent," in dialogues about race (Sue et al., 2011, pg 333). They elaborated, "White students were perceived to be silent for fear of disclosing biases. In contrast, students of color were perceived to be fearful of being invalidated," (Sue et al., 2011, pg 336). They found that the "denial and minimization of racial topics" is often experienced as an invalidation of their racial realities and experiences by students of color, which may evoke emotions such as anger, frustration, and alienation (Sue et al., 2011).

### *Social Identity*

Social statuses carry weight in the way individuals and groups are viewed and treated in society. Social status is not a biological fact, but a social phenomenon: its meaning is understood through the context in which it has been defined, through the expectations held about certain individuals or groups (Foladare, 1969).

Brewer (1991) describes social identity as a compromise between assimilation and distinction from others. The human need for validation by others is satisfied through ingroup membership, and the need for uniqueness is satisfied by inter-group comparisons (Brewer, 1991).

There is a clarification between social identity and group membership: Whereas membership can be voluntary or imposed, social identities are chosen (Brewer, 1991). Alcoff (2006) elaborates that identities must resonate with an individual and provide meaning, whereas group membership is more of a characterization. One can be a member of a social group without that categorization being a part of their identity (Brewer, 1991).

Social identities are often interconnected and the links between them may impact the perceptions and experiences one has with their identities. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, "examines how multiple social identities such as race, gender, sexual identity intersect at the level of individual experience (i.e., the micro level) to reveal multiple interlocking social inequality (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism) at the macro social-structural level," (Crenshaw, 1989);(Bowleg, 2012, pg 755). The experiences one has because of the identities they hold can highlight the relationships between systemic issues and how these maintain inequities. Intersectionality also provides a path to understanding how people of multiple marginalized identities may simultaneously feel that they cannot separate their identities [for example, a Black queer man may not be able to detach himself from his Blackness] and that they must separate their identities [for example, he may choose to hide his queerness in predominately heterosexual spaces].

In many ways, identity is linked to self-esteem. In some cases, group identities, especially in regards to stigmatized identities, can serve as a defense mechanism against negative impacts on self-esteem (Brewer, 1991). Studies have shown that individuals of marginalized groups often perceive higher levels of discrimination against



their group rather than against themselves directly (Brewer, 1991). This is both an example of separating threats to self-esteem from one's personal identity as well as the strength and community of shared group identities.

It might also be the case that people who hold marginalized identities may want to disassociate from the group. Disassociating from the group can be a way to protect self-esteem or a way to avoid negative associations/oppressions that are attached to an identity (Brewer, 1991). Disassociating is either possible or impossible because of the visibility of the identity. While someone who is White may be able to choose to disassociate from their European identity and instead claim another ethnic identity, someone who is Black may not be able to disassociate from their Black identity because they are not able to pass as another racial or ethnic identity.

### *Visible Identities*

Many group memberships and identities are seen through the body. These visible markers influence the way people are perceived and treated (Alcoff, 2006). Two of the most prominent identities are race and gender. While these both have the potential to be fluid and concealed, it is typically much more difficult to hide these identities than it would be to hide identities such as political affiliation and religion.

Visible identities are often addressed or interpreted by the general public because these identities are salient and are thus deemed "public property" for consideration and debate. Alcoff (2006) claims that people carry the same identities regardless if they are in a public or private setting, but the identities may stand out more in public because that forum is much less intimate. However, appearing in public fully



identified might not be possible for some individuals who have marginalized or stigmatized identities. Individuals may experience pressure to assimilate or conceal their identities due to the potential repercussions or oppressions for overtly expressing those identities. The visibility of identities can be simultaneously divisive and segregating as well as an opportunity for community, solidarity, and unity (Alcoff, 2006).

### *Concealed Identities*

Identities may be inherently hidden such as religion, sexual orientation, or political affiliation – unless outwardly displayed through clothing or other visual cues – or they may be deliberately concealed for a multitude of reasons, including negative associations with that identity. Quinn (2017) claims that people conceal identities to avoid the discrimination they believe they will face if the identity is known to others. This is especially true for people with internalized stigma, who may use identity concealment as a protective strategy in preventing negative repercussions and treatment (Quinn, 2017).

While concealing identities may be beneficial in the short term [such as a safety measure], it can be detrimental in the long term. Consciously hiding an identity can be taxing and may prevent meaningful relationships with others (Quinn, 2017). Studies have shown that participants who hid a stigmatized identity, such as one's sexual orientation, reported negative job satisfaction, including lower feelings of belonging and low self-esteem (Quinn, 2017). Concealing an identity has similar effects on psychological and physical health as directly experiencing discrimination, such as stress and hypertension (Quinn, 2017),

## *Passing*

Passing is a practice in which an individual adopts an identity or role that they may not otherwise be able to identify with because of the limitations of societal definitions and standards (Khanna, 2010). Passing may be an intentional effort, in which the individual is passing in order to achieve something otherwise unavailable to them, or a miscategorization by others (Ahmed, 1999). Passing can be successful or unsuccessful depending on if the individual's identity was perceived in the way they intended (Ahmed, 1999).

There is inherent social power and privilege intertwined with passing. For example, there is a difference between a White person passing for Black and a Black person passing for White. Dawkins (2012) wrote that passing normalizes racial hierarchy: "Because it is entwined with the racist one-drop rule. Even if a person has White ancestry and looks White, he is considered 'really' Black because of his Black ancestry (no matter how distant); White identity is perceived as somehow 'fraudulent'," (Khanna, 2010, pg 381).

Passing may occur for numerous reasons including a way of belonging or a way of survival. Khanna (2010) described passing as a way to blend in to feel accepted by peers. For individuals in marginalized communities, passing as a more socially accepted or dominant identity may be a protective measure against social antagonism and conflict.



### *Public and Private Settings*

The setting in which social identities are expressed is also significant in how the individuals are treated. Yogeeswaran et al. (2011) investigated the public and private displays of ethnic identities and found drastic differences in the perceptions and treatments of White individuals and individuals of color. White people expressed greater prejudice toward ethnic minorities who strongly identified with their ethnic identities, in comparison to minorities who weakly identified (Yogeeswaran et al., 2011). Strongly identifying with one's ethnic group equated the individual with not identifying with or being a part of the broader culture—being less “American.”

“Strong ethnic identity is likely to be accepted when it is practiced in the privacy of one's home but rejected when it is practiced in public life because public expressions threaten the positive distinctiveness of the national group by overtly violating the national prototype,” (Yogeeswaran et al., 2011, pg 909). If one can assimilate and conceal their ethnic identity, they are potentially protected from prejudice. Thus, they are provided with more safety because of their visible belonging.

### *Feelings of Belonging on Campus*

The success of students is heavily influenced by the development of feelings of belonging— especially for the retention of “at risk” students such as ethnic minorities and students of low socioeconomic status (O’Keeffe, 2013). Belonging is a feeling of connectedness to others and one’s setting. Booker (2016) includes a sense of being “accepted, included, valued, and encouraged” by others, especially in a classroom setting. Feeling that one’s ideas and perspectives are valued in a classroom can help

an individual be more receptive to information, contribute to discussion, and take knowledge beyond the classroom.

Students who feel they do not belong, or feel rejected, may not adapt as well to academic challenges (O'Keeffe, 2013). A major factor in student retention is establishing a meaningful relationship between the student and another individual at the university, such as a mentor or faculty member (O'Keeffe, 2013). Booker (2016) found that interactions with faculty who were accessible, approachable, and authentic contributed to a student's degree persistence. Students highlighted faculty who used "real-world" examples to relate to students' backgrounds and experiences, as well as noting the importance of faculty of color who provide "safe spaces" to engage in dialogue and express opinions (Booker, 2016). Allowing space to explore ideas and be one's authentic self is crucial to an individual's involvement and growth in and outside the classroom.

Students of color attending a historically or predominately White university often experience feelings of isolation, feelings of being an outsider, loneliness, stress, invalidation, and separation (Sue et al., 2011). Students report feeling a weight of being the "other" and not being fully integrated into the campus and student life, a lack of representation and seeing "people like me" (McCabe, 2009), and feeling unwelcome at the university (Booker, 2016). Smith et al. (2007) found that the college environment is more hostile and unwelcoming to African American men than any other group. McCabe (2009) referred to the "paradox of invisibility" in which Black men were either ignored and overlooked or hyper-visible and treated as stereotypes. Black male students were not valued, respected, or wanted in academic, social, and public spaces. They were



viewed and treated as outsiders: out of place, “fitting the description” of an unwanted or criminal characteristic, and illegitimate members of the community (Smith et al., 2007). This makes finding community, establishing meaningful relationships, and therefore, feelings of belonging and inclusivity even more crucial for Black men and students of color to succeed on campus.

### *Microaggressions*

Today's prejudice and discrimination are often more covert and take the shape of microaggressions, rather than the overt “Old-Fashioned” racism that coddled slavery and systematic discrimination (Bowleg, 2012).

Racial microaggressions have been defined as the “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color,” (Sue et al., 2007). These subtle snubs occur habitually and are often dismissed or overlooked as innocent or well intentioned. Microaggressions may be as explicit as the racist note left on a student's doorstep on September 2, 2016 at Ball State University (Smith, 2016), or they may be more ambiguous, such as an advertisement with zero people of color, in which the lack of representation is apparent and may communicate an underlying message of “this is not for you.” Microaggressions are often belittling, such as telling a person of color that they are “articulate,” with the underlying stereotypical expectation that they are less intelligent or incapable of using academic language. Microaggressions may be ignorant: asking a person of color “what are you?” or “where are you from?” thus communicating that they are foreign and do not belong.



Microaggressions maintain power imbalances and systems of prejudice, discrimination, and racism because they are often unnoticed or unchallenged. In some instances, direct and explicit acts of racism may be easier to confront than microaggressions because of the inherent ambiguity (Sue et al., 2007). This is especially true in regards to intent behind the microaggressions: the perpetrator may be completely unaware of their actions, though the actions are still impactful and harmful to the receiver.

“Racial Battle Fatigue” was used to describe the social-psychological stress responses to the pervasive stereotypes and microaggressions associated with being a person of color on a historically white campus—and specifically a Black man (Smith et al., 2007). Smith et al. (2007) found Black male students reporting feelings of frustration, avoidance or withdrawal, anger, resentment, helplessness, and hopelessness. Booker (2016) also included feelings of exclusion and low self-esteem among Black students. Concealing and managing these feelings was described as draining and “exhausting” (Sue et al., 2011).

Studies have shown that the more racial microaggressions an individual experiences, the lower their reported self-esteem is (Nadal et al., 2014). Additionally, lower self-esteem is more likely when an individual experiences a microaggression in which they are treated as a second-class citizen or criminal, specifically in a school or workplace environment (Nadal et al., 2014).

The location in which the microaggressive, hostile instances occur can be significant to understanding the context of the incidents. Sue et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of racial-self awareness in fostering safe and productive learning

environments. McCabe (2009) found that Black women reported experiencing microaggressions in the classroom at higher rates than any other demographic. This included being overlooked while sharing an opinion or not feeling as if they could share at all, as well as being asked to be the spokesperson for their race-gender group (McCabe, 2009). This spokesperson pressure created a burden of representation; feelings of uneasiness, anxiety, frustration; a sense of simultaneous invisibility and hyper-prominence [in which others were oblivious to the student's experience] (Booker, 2016);(McCabe, 2009). Students reported a desire to be seen as an individual rather than a representative for their race (Booker, 2016).

Microaggressions can diminish or be a barrier to learning, productivity, and the development of belonging on campus (Sue et al., 2011). Microaggressions can also contribute to the perceptions and expectations of peers, faculty, and administration at the university in fostering a culture of inclusivity and accountability.

In Sue et al.'s 2011 study, participants emphasized that the lack of acknowledgment of microaggressions in the administration and on campus allowed for the continued perpetuation by students, faculty, and staff (Sue et al., 2011). Booker's study involving African American undergraduate women (2016) found that microaggressions had a significant impact on students' perceptions of faculty and peers, and contributed to their decision to remain enrolled in classes.

### *Ball State University*

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2015) reported findings of student engagement and campus environment for Ball State University, in comparison to other



Indiana state schools, Carnegie class, and Peer. Students at Ball State University reported significantly lower averages in the category of “discussions with diverse others.” Only 60-63% of students reported having discussions with people of a different race or ethnicity “very often” or “often,” in comparison to 71-73% at similar institutions (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2015). When asked how much the institution emphasized “encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds,” 47-54% of students reported “very much,” or “quite a bit,” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2015). Additionally, only 46-57% of students reported they felt the institution encouraged “attending events that address important social, economic, political issues,” (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2015).

The Diversity and Inclusion mission statement at Ball State University states that the success of the university is dependent upon “our efforts to cultivate inclusivity within our pedagogical, scholarly, and creative pursuits,” (Ball State University, 2017). The National Survey of Student Engagement has shown that by not creating or uplifting opportunities for students to engage with people of different backgrounds than their own or engage in cultural events, the institution is not fulfilling its Diversity and Inclusion mission statement.

### *Conclusion*

Alcoff (2006) asserts that it is someone’s behavior that should be examined and questioned, not their identity. One has a choice in their behavior—the way they act and treat others—whereas they do not have a choice in who gave birth to them. Statuses,

identities, and groups that offer individuals a choice in becoming members of [such as political affiliation and religion] are malleable and have the potential for change, and thus allow for the potential for debate and criticism.

Race and its intersections with other identities impact and shape individuals' experiences on a college campus, in the community, and in any other setting. As race is a part of classroom dialogues, there is the opportunity for sensitive material to be brought up – especially in relation to an individual's experience. In Sue et al.'s 2011 study, they discussed the dynamics of a racially heterogeneous classroom; in which White students may be more likely to be silent to avoid the discomfort of showing their biases or offending students of color, whereas students of color may be silent to avoid the potential frustration, hurt, invalidation, and alienation that may follow as a result of sharing their experiences and opinions. The classroom experience can serve as an example of the common feelings of isolation and "othering" of students of color at predominately or historically White institutions (McCabe, 2009).

By investigating the application of these studies to [the predominately White institution] Ball State University, it is clear that although the university has endorsed diversity and inclusion through their mission statement, the National Survey of Student Engagement has shown that a statement is not enough.

In regards to recommendations made by participants in Sue et al.'s 2011 study, faculty and administration must consider the kind of environment they are fostering in their classes, organizations, and overall campus that allows microaggressive behavior to be viewed as normal and acceptable. Faculty and administration must educate themselves on how to be better leaders in diversity and inclusion efforts. Diversity



cannot be viewed as something that simply is; it must be a conscious and continuous effort to work toward inclusivity and equity for all people.

## Film

### Do You Trust Me?

Please view the attached file "Film: Do You Trust Me?" on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5J5WvXZ2EY> or on the flash drive.



## **Press Kit**

### **Do You Trust Me?**

Please see the attached document "Press Kit" on the flash drive.

## Artist Statement

### Do You Trust Me?

There are numerous tips and guidelines for risk reduction strategies in regards to violence against womxn. While in general it is smart and important to be alert, these guidelines amass into completely unrealistic expectations for an individual to exercise. They often blame the victim of violence or harassment, citing what she should have done to prevent someone from acting upon her. These guidelines primarily relate to instances with strangers, though we know that between 70-93% of sexual violence is committed by someone the victim or survivor knows (RAINN, 2018). These poems and images were inspired by conversations I had with two of my friends [who also identify as womxn]. We discussed what it would mean if we were not socialized to fear the night.<sup>1</sup> What it would mean if we didn't have to think twice and wonder if our male friends escorting us to our rooms are ensuring our safety or inflicting our inferiority. If we didn't have to employ ridiculous strategies to protect ourselves – physically, mentally, and emotionally – including reciting poetry when walking down the street. If we didn't have to chant song lyrics to keep ourselves sane and encourage strangers passing by to perceive us as crazy and therefore unpredictable, dangerous, or not worth the effort. What it would mean to live in a world in which fearing our wallets are stolen is the worst thing that could happen to us on our trek home. What it would mean if we didn't assume discomfort and uneasiness as habitual feelings. What it would mean for perpetrators to be held responsible and accountable for their actions.

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<sup>1</sup> We are socialized both actively and passively; actively being taught self-defense strategies to employ in dangerous situations, as well as passively witnessing and learning about other womxn's experiences and knowing that the same thing could happen to me.



## Poems/Graphics

### Do You Trust Me?

Please see the attached images, "Poems: Do You Trust Me?" as a physical copy or on the flash drive.

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I'm gonna be scared either way so I might as well be listening to dope music  
how do I protect myself at night?  
the only strategies I know are for combatting hide-and-seek-playing strangers in bushes:  
don't walk alone carry pepper spray wear shoes you can run in have 911 ready to press call  
don't wear a ponytail carry an umbrella hold your keys between your knuckles don't wear headphones  
how do I protect myself at night buckled against the sublime poster on your bedroom wall,  
tangled in your chillingly-soft-lived-in sheets and my resuscitated submissiveness?  
say nothing, hesitate, beg my incessant frigidity births a portkey, solar plexus instep nose groin?  
don't wear headphones don't wear headphones don't wear headphones  
clip clap  
could be my pulse in my eyes or two steps closer to the worst thing that could happen to me  
hey sir play bodak yellow latin trap remix  
breathe in two beats out three  
three minutes 43 seconds  
I will be scared for three minutes 43 seconds  
as long as I'm alive



To be crazy  
I memorized this song so you wouldn't talk to me  
Conjured a wavering voice from my carotid metronome  
Said "Lil bitch, you can't fuck with me ni aunque tú quieras"  
  
My hypothalamus begs my goose-bumped legs to speed up  
The minefield of sidewalk cracks threaten to impart my perturbation  
"Soy la más dura en la calle know you prolly heard of me"  
  
Tripping over verses until you think I'm crazy  
I haven't lost my mind; it's there beneath the sole of your boot  
"I'm a boss, you a worker, yo alante y tú atrás"  
  
These lyrics cannot be conjugated as a solicitation  
Will I have the pleasure of your averted gaze?  
"Si me ves no me saludes tú y yo no somos amigas"

Balises are lyrics from "Bodak Yellow Latin Trap Remix" by Cardi B



Please take my wallet  
I wish you didn't dub me pretty girl  
I wish you would replace my debit card with a credit card / I don't even know my credit score  
I wish your fingers didn't settle in after a long day wrapped around the perspiration between three of my fatigued ribs  
I wish you would confiscate my driver's license / I would rather erase evidence of the freshman 15  
I wish the hoot-and-snicker of your laughter wasn't the earworm of this poem  
I wish you palmed my crinkled Culver's Scoopie Tokens instead / I don't really go there anymore  
I wish you didn't remind me of the freeze [hands up] in my fight or flight instinct  
I wish you took my wallet / please take my wallet



Slip Up  
I'm not scared of the night but it's hard to see past  
I quit my job in the prediction business because  
My asthmatic lungs urge me not to hold my  
Slip up, one off, non-serial, abnormal  
  
the incessant images blinding my eyes  
I couldn't guess which re-run will air tonight  
breath awaiting the next Nice Guy's slip up  
Isolated incident, nonstandard, exception  
  
Tonight will be the night  
He turns on me  
Tonight will be the night  
He gropes my breasts  
He snaps my underwear  
He spits "take it bitch"  
He slips out and nods off  
He has no idea what he did  
Tonight will be the night  
He has no idea what he did  
Tonight will be the night  
He has no idea what he did  
Tonight will be the night  
He has no idea what he did  
And I will tell everyone  
It was a bad date